

The Newsletter of the Wyoming Public Transit Association

2021 Wyoming Public Transit Association Award Nominations

Dispatcher of the Year Nominees

Nominee: Karen Morrison

Agency: Cody Council on Aging, Inc.

Nomination by Jim Krubeck, Transportation Supervisor

Karen Morrison has an interesting history with the Cody Senior Center. She was, at one point a passenger as an escort, then became a TSI certified driver. But here is the part of the story where she became a dispatcher. We had suddenly found ourselves without a dispatch person, and she jumped out of the driver's and into the hot seat. So, basically, Karen saved the day for our transit system.

Certainly, it was helpful to have been a driver when moving into the dispatch position, but still there was much to learn, and she accomplished it impressively. She will tell you that it wasn't an easy transition, but that she was happy to do what it took to keep things running smoothly, which she did.

Karen is no longer in the full time dispatch position, but is willing to fill the void in a moment's notice without complaint and save the day yet again, during any arising need in dispatch. For us, that is of immeasurable value in our transit system.

I would be remiss in not mentioning, that Karen has graciously filled in other temporary vacancies at the Cody Senior Center. Areas such as, the kitchen, the dining room, and the Senior Center Thrift Barn.

A staff member so completely willing to fill in with little warning in dispatch, with often times a half an hour notice, is worthy of this nomination. I therefore nominate Karen Morrison for dispatcher of the year 2021.

Nominee: Aneta Fink

Agency: North Big Horn Senior Center

Nomination by Julie Durham, Director

Aneta Fink has been an employee at North Big Horn Senior Center for 30 years. Two years ago, she moved into the position as Dispatcher. As dispatcher she has had to learn all new aspects of the Senior Center. Aneta knows everyone in town and gets along with everyone. She is a walking encyclopedia when it comes to knowing where someone lives, who their families are, what their phone number is, and any other information you may need. She has worked hard at taking calls, scheduling, and effectively communicating with our clients. Aneta is also a fill-in driver, Meals on Wheels scheduler, and is always ready to lend a hand wherever she is needed.

Aneta's compassion for our Senior population, our staff, and our town is incredible. Aneta is giving of her time, her energy, and most of all her heart. She is always finding ways to encourage everyone with little stickers, post-it-notes, words of encouragement, a big smile, and the greatest good mornings to all the staff.

I am grateful to work with Aneta and to learn from her positive attitude.

Editor's note:

This issue of the *Transit Express* includes edited nominations for the 2021 WYTRANS Annual Awards. Nominee information is in alphabetical order by the agency represented. WYTRANS Members will be sent a separate ballot to vote for the nominees. Winners will be announced at the WYTRANS Conference in Thermopolis June 15-17.

Driver of the Year Nominees

Nominee: Angela Lawson

Agency: Cody Council on Aging

Nomination by Jim Krubeck, Transportation Supervisor

Angela Lawson has been a driver at the Cody Senior Center for just about 10 years. She has a very close relationship with her passengers, and treats them like family.

As a transportation supervisor/trainer, I watch the different transit tasks that my drivers do to ensure they are performing their duties efficiently as trained. As I have observed Angela, I found her following all the TSI training instructions, both classroom and hands on, diligently. It is an interesting thing, to watch her escort a client with difficulty walking, and notice that she is not only safely escorting them, but that they are treated like royalty. Therefore, it appears that safety “is” her goal, but also individual special treatment. Further, Angela has handled some emergencies in a professional manner.

One thing I require in this transit system, is reporting changes in clients to other drivers to ensure there are no surprises as we share the client load. She is quick to share that information, which adds to our client safety.

If Angela has any downtime between rides, she goes to our dining room to help the seniors in any way she can. That could be carrying their trays, getting them anything that they need, greeting them, helping them get their coats on, escorting people across icy spots in the parking lot. You name it, she has done it. The clients love that treatment.

I do not see an end in the near future in her serving transit clients in a friendly, efficient, and extremely safe way. Based on the things I have just shared and more, I nominate Angela Lawson for driver of the year 20201.

Nominee: Amanda Garoutte

Agency: Crook County Senior Services

Nomination by Jenna Ellsbury, Director

I would like to nominate Amanda Garoutte for Driver of the Year. Amanda has been an amazing addition to our Crook County Senior Services family. We call her our Carebear. She goes above and beyond her job description.

She provides individual attention by assisting with walking and with doors to the very front counter or store front. She has also lovingly assisted with activities after arrival like pushing shopping carts and navigation of large stores. She is quick to offer a smile, a warm conversation, and a helping hand.

Eight to five does not apply to Amanda. We have a 100 mile radius for transportation. Depending on where our clients live, she might be on the road for two hours before they even reach their destination. She has braved icy roads this winter and shoveled snow for our clients so they can safely leave their homes. She makes accommodations to leave extremely early or stay out late to make sure our clients are able to make their early or late doctor appointments/medical procedures that are only available in the early mornings or late afternoons.

Amanda’s service does not end when the trip ends. On numerous occasions, she has assisted our clients when they arrive home. In one case she assisted a senior get a copy of her birth certificate. This was a daunting task because this individual did not know the name of the town she was born in or much of the pertinent information. She has also helped clean homes and even set up a guest bed.

Amanda has gone above and beyond the job description of driver in countless ways. Her flexibility and positive attitude help stir excitement to help our seniors the best way possible. I encourage you to strongly to consider Amanda for Driver of the Year.

Nominee: Alice Krum

Agency: Eppson Center for Seniors

Nomination by Valerie Parrish, Transportation Director

Not only is Alice Krum a great employee, she is an absolutely wonderful human being. As soon as she arrives to work, everyone on staff is greeted with her cheery “Good Morning!”, and she maintains that positive attitude all day, every day. Twice a week, Alice transports our general patrons and everyone loves her! She also drives the van that we have specifically designated for our clients who receive dialysis so, the other three days a week, she takes them to and from their appointments, including holidays. Because she sees these people so frequently, she has developed

strong relationships with several of them, and it is not unusual for Alice to cook for and deliver meals to those she knows will be alone on holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. She has also gone so far as to spend her free time on a weekend driving someone to a destination, hours away because she knew this person had no other ride.

Besides doing her own job extremely well, Alice is incredibly reliable and conscientious, keeps her van spotless, covers dispatch when needed and is eager to learn the responsibilities that go along with it, and jumps in to help every other department in our organization when she can. These things all demonstrate that Alice definitely goes above and beyond the call of duty. However, as admirable as all that is, it pales in comparison to the fact that she is incredibly kind and generous, has a heart of gold, and genuinely wants to help people which is why, on behalf of all of us here at the Eppson Center for Seniors, I enthusiastically nominate Alice Krum for the honor of Driver of the Year.

Nominee: Tom Lawson

Agency: Goose Creek Transit

Nomination by Steve Ainslie, Director

I would like to nominate Tom Lawson for the 2021 WYTRANS Driver of the Year. Tom just started his fourth year as a driver for Goose Creek Transit and he has always done an exceptional job.

There are many reasons that I think Tom is worthy of WYTRANS Driver of the Year and I would like to touch on a couple of them.

Tom is a veteran and he never misses an opportunity to thank other vets for their service. One of the vets that we transport regularly, started riding with us shortly after Tom started to drive for GCT. The vet was in a wheelchair and access to his house was a real challenge that involved narrow concrete steps that were always icy and treacherous. So much so that I wanted to observe the first time we picked him up and see just how we were going to be able to load him. And Tom was the first GCT driver to get to load this new vet. I have to say that I thought the task of loading him was too dangerous. But Tom did not think so and he never balked at being his driver. And rather than complain about the difficulty involved, Tom thanked him for his service, and I was quite moved by it.

Tom has a lot of empathy for the people we transport. I think his empathy may be his

strongest quality and makes him perfectly suited for this job. A couple of years ago, during a staff meeting with all of my drivers, some of them started to complain about an elderly couple who were in their 90's and we transported them every day of the week. She had dementia and was also incontinent. He refused to allow anyone else to assist with their care. Some of my drivers felt that we should not have to transport them at all. It was kind of a heated discussion and it broke my heart. But after the meeting was over and most of my staff had left for the day, Tom came to my office and said that he would transport them anytime. And that I could always assign them to his bus. For these reasons and many more, I believe that Tom Lawson should be WYTRANS Driver of the Year.

Nominee: Mary Elizondo

Agency: STAR Transit

Nomination by Mary Seppie, Director

Mary Elizondo has worked for STAR Transit since 2008. Mary begins early in the morning and provides rides throughout the day in Green River. Although there is another driver who provides some service in Green River, Mary is the primary driver there and many times she is very busy. Normally, Mary also transports customers from their homes in Green River and transfers them to the shuttle bus going to Rock Springs. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, STAR decided that it would be best not to transfer buses, so Mary often brought the shuttle customers directly to Rock Springs. Mary always did this without complaint.

Our Green River passengers are mainly senior citizens, and many of them will ask if Mary will be their driver when they call to schedule their rides. Mary has a no-nonsense way about her. She is always courteous and kind to her passengers, but they also know she will not tolerate anyone not following the rules of the bus. The riders, other drivers, and dispatchers all respect her. Because of her experience, drivers will often ask her advice on transportation and/or rider issues. She is always willing to step in and help if we are short-handed or if someone needs time off. Again, she does this without hesitation and never complains. This flexibility is always appreciated, but it was an indispensable quality during the pandemic. Mary makes STAR's transportation system a better and safer experience for everyone. She is a valuable asset to STAR Transit, which is why I am nominating her for Driver of the Year.

WYTRANS Agency of the Year - Nominations Submitted by WYDOT

Nominee: Services for Seniors

Director—Carolyn Teter



Carolyn Teter stepped in to fill the gap when the previous director left on short notice. You would never know that she hasn't been the director for an extended period of time. She certainly hit the ground running and has continued to provide excellent service - both to the community and to WYDOT when information requests were made. During the WYTRANS Conferences each year, Carolyn soaks up the information like a sponge and she is great at asking questions and is eager to learn, which WYDOT really appreciates.

Nominee: Sweetwater County Transit Authority Resource

Director—Mary Seppie



Mary Seppie stepped into the new role of Director when Judy Owens retired. She also took over for Judy as a member of the WYTRANS Board. Through COVID, she and her team brainstormed to make STAR's service more effective and streamlined, which is materializing as a mode shift. If WYDOT contacts STAR with any questions, Mary is always quick to respond with answers. STAR is a constant figure at the annual WYTRANS Conferences and contributes greatly to its success. STAR shows its competitive spirit regarding Performance Measures points each season.

Nominee: Washakie County Senior Citizens Center

Director— Wendy Fredricks



Wendy Fredricks has always had great communication with WYDOT. This year was no different. She took on a project of building a new 4-bay bus garage. She would send pictures, updating us on its progress. It was a huge project for a senior center of their size and it has turned out to be a really nice addition to their transit program. She is always on time with her ridership and monthly expense reports and is very responsive to new ideas and suggestions. Washakie County Senior Citizens Center makes attending the annual WYTRANS conference a priority.

Volunteer of the Year Nominees

Nominee: Sarah Weedin

Agency: Cody Council on Aging, Inc.

Nomination by Jim Krubeck, Transportation Supervisor

I wish to nominate Sarah Weedin for Volunteer of the Year for 2021.

During the 28 and a half years I have served at the Cody Senior Center, I have seen many people volunteer for long periods of time. Sarah Weeding truly falls into that category. For most of the years that I have been working here, she has been a volunteer.

But with Sarah, she does this task with compassion, kindness, that beautiful smile, total dependability, and treats every Rolling Meal recipient as family. They truly love her, and we have found her of great value as well.

Oh, but there is another element to Sarah's service, and I would be remiss if I did not mention that her equally awesome husband, Doug Weedin, has served in the same faithful manner as Sarah. As of late, I often see Doug loading up "his" truck with the same dependability and seems to fill-in often, and serve with the same compassionate approach that his lovely spouse has done. They are a remarkable couple and true servants to the Cody community.

We would love to show our appreciation to Sarah Weeding for the many years of faithful service with this well deserved award.

Nominee: Don Snider

Agency: Thayne Senior Center

Nomination by Melinda Pebbles, Director

The Thayne Senior Center would like to nominate Don Snider for the Volunteer of the Year. He has volunteered, along with his wife, as a home delivered meal driver at the center for many years. He also serves on our board of directors.

Don is willing to do anything we ask. He does various handyman tasks at the center and cuts our wood for craft projects. He is an excellent home delivered meal driver. He is very kind and is loved by all the seniors he delivers meals to. We are so appreciative of all the help Don gives to the seniors and the staff of the senior center.

2021 WYTRANS Conference

Tuesday afternoon, June 15

- ◆ Paratransit Operator Training—Day 1 of 3
- ◆ Trainers' Dinner Meeting

Wednesday, June 16

- ◆ Paratransit Operator Training Continued
- ◆ Communication Strategies
- ◆ Reasonable Modifications
- ◆ **Awards Luncheon**
- ◆ Making Meetings work for you
- ◆ Empowering your board to lead
- ◆ WYTRANS Board Meeting

Thursday morning, June 17

- ◆ Paratransit Operator Training Continued
- ◆ National RTAP Update
- ◆ WYTRANS Member Panel Discussion
- ◆ WYDOT and FTA Session

A complete schedule and registration material will be included in the May issue of the Transit Express.

*This year's WYTRANS Conference will be held at the Thermopolis Days Inn. A block of sleeping rooms has been reserved there. Please call 307.864.3131. to make you reservations before **May 28, 2021.***

Outstanding Service Award Nominees

Nominee: Renae Jording

Agency: Cheyenne Transit

Nomination by Keith McQueen, Assistant Director

Anyone who has ever had the pleasure of knowing or interacting with Renae Jording knows immediately that she has a passion for public transportation. Due to this passion, she envisions the future for public transportation differently than most. She wants it to thrive, grow and help everyone, not just individuals with life situations that deem public transportation necessary. This is how Renae is all the time, not just when she is at conferences or in a group of people. Everyday life of a transit employee is interesting as every day can bring new challenges. Renae embraces these challenges head on as she not only talks the talk, but she walks the walk. She is famous for saying “We do good things for good people,” and this is not just a catchphrase or motto. This is what Renae firmly believes and has worked tirelessly towards each and every day for the last 28 years.

Along with the rest of the world, Cheyenne Transit was heavily effected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Renae had the option to work from home, but she wanted to lead from the front. She wasn't going to ask someone to perform a task that she herself was not willing to do. She worked in her office everyday looking for a solution to extra funding and options to provide safe, reliable transportation to the public as it was unknown what public transportation's future looked like at that time. She spoke with numerous people across the country, interviewing different software vendors while looking for the perfect solution. She was able to find that solution which at this point, 9 months later, has been integral in providing thousands of safe, reliable trips to individuals in Cheyenne.

During this time, the City of Cheyenne was laying off individuals from different departments. Under Renae's leadership, Cheyenne Transit had zero layoffs and allowed every employee to earn a full paycheck. She also jumped at this opportunity to grow our staff saving two individuals from losing their job. She heard about the city layoffs and that very same day had revised her budget to allow transit to absorb these employees creating a win-win situation for the employees and transit.

Renae deserves this nomination as she has performed outstanding throughout an almost impossible year. Thanks to her, members of our general public kept dialysis appointments, groceries in the refrigerator and their employment. Also, thanks to her, employees at Cheyenne Transit slept great at night knowing their jobs were secure and they were safe when they went to work. Renae's performance in 2020 deserves recognition and if I had more room to provide more information I would.

Nominee: Kayla Strid

Agency: Cody Council on Aging

Nomination by Jim Krubeck, Transportation Supervisor

I would like to nominate Kayla Strid for the Outstanding Service Award. Kayla Strid was working at the Cody Senior Center's Thrift Barn when COVID-19 struck our country last year. She was able to find friends to look after her child and jumped in with both feet to fill the suddenly vacant position of Rolling Meals Coordinator while still lending support when she could to the Thrift Barn until it closed to customers due to the Pandemic.

Kayla did an excellent job of learning the ropes in her new position and soon began supporting the center with many hats throughout the day. We were so impressed with Kayla's performance that she has been moved from the Rolling Meals position and has assisted the statistician with monthly counts and data entry, covered the front office in times of need, backed up whenever necessary in Rolling Meals, the Thrift Barn and even kitchen duty. Today you can find her rolling along in her new position as Executive Secretary where the Executive Director finds her an invaluable asset, counting on her for a myriad of daily tasks as well as designing the newsletter each month, creating a webpage for the center and keeping our seniors up to date with daily posts on our Facebook page.

What an incredible value it is to have Kayla as part of our team, versed in so many areas with 100% willingness to help make our facility run smoothly.

An added bonus with Kayla is a great sense of humor. Some laughter here and there in any workplace brings life and good morale.

I whole heartedly nominate Kayla Strid, as she is an outstanding staff member and truly, a team player!

Nominee: Jenny Perry

Agency: Crook County Senior Services

Nomination by Jenna Ellsbury, Director

I would like to nominate Jenny Perry for the Outstanding Service Award. Jenny is a very talented and dedicated employee. She is our cook and assists our site manager for the Town of Hulett, WY. She provides transportation, cooking, and activities for us. She has volunteered hundreds of hours for us and the community.

Jenny actively strives to target gaps in healthcare for the geriatric population. She has a true heart for looking after our seniors. She has done everything from addressing individual needs like setting up DVD players in resident's homes to community events and fundraising. She has played a mother, spiritual advisor, and caregiver to many of our employees.

Jenny also has become a certified community paramedic. She has provided CPR and first aid courses for much of the county. She has assisted in saving hundreds of lives in our county throughout her EMS career. She has been on the scene of countless fires in the county. She rarely calls in sick but when she does her first concern is the strain it would cause on the EMS team. Jenny is always thinking about her community and our seniors. There are countless examples of her dedication. There was once a terminally ill woman whom Jenny befriended who wanted to return back to the area. She was located out of state. Jenny persevered and was able to get her own local ambulance to return her. Her ride home was surrounded with familiar faces and with her friend Jenny.

I strongly encourage you to consider Jenny for the Outstanding Service Award. She is a wonderful friend, mother, employee, volunteer, congregant, first responder, caregiver, etc.... We are so blessed to have her and I want her to be recognized for all she does.

Nominee: Cheryl Bjornsrud

Agency: Ten Sleep Senior Center

Nomination by Randy Firnekas, Director

200 or 300 words cannot adequately express how valuable Cheryl Bjornsrud has been to the Ten Sleep Senior Center. Cheri always goes above and beyond while working at the Center. When she is off the center clock she's still volunteering and helping out her neighbors with needful things, as well as contributing her time and efforts to other community events.

Cheri is our bookkeeper, activities director, and driver, and does an outstanding job wearing those hats. I nominated her last year and used this statement, which still holds true today, "Cheri relentlessly keeps people interested in all of the activities and services here at the center." After we are fully opened, she is excited to be able to get our people out and about again, by planning various activities and trips to interesting places of local history.

Apart from working here at the center, some other hats that Cheri wears well, is that she's a bookkeeper for a non-profit organization in Arizona, caretaker for her Down syndrome sister, Grace who will be 61 in July, secretary and piano player for her church, a loving housewife and mom to her great husband, Bill who has MS, and their five children, and last but not least a proud grandmother of 17 grandchildren! Because of the great, and loving person that she is to her family, community, and all that she does to help keep things going here at the center, I am extremely pleased to nominate Cheryl Bjornsrud for this year's 2021 WYTRANS "Outstanding Service Award." Cheri is a remarkable person.

WYTRANS Conference Room Reservations

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